

# Enniskillen Castle

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A short guide to the castle complex





**Enniskillen Castle**, situated beside the River Erne in County Fermanagh, was built almost 600 years ago by the Gaelic Maguires. Guarding one of the few passes into Ulster, it was strategically important throughout its history. In the 17th century it became an English garrison fort and served as a military barracks until the mid 20th century.

Hugh Maguire is believed to have built the first castle here in the early 15th century to command the Erne waterway.



**The Maguire Family Crest**

The site was an important centre of the Maguire lordship and parts of the Keep may date from that period. The Castle was a focus of warfare in the 16th century, and was the site of an eight-day siege in 1594.

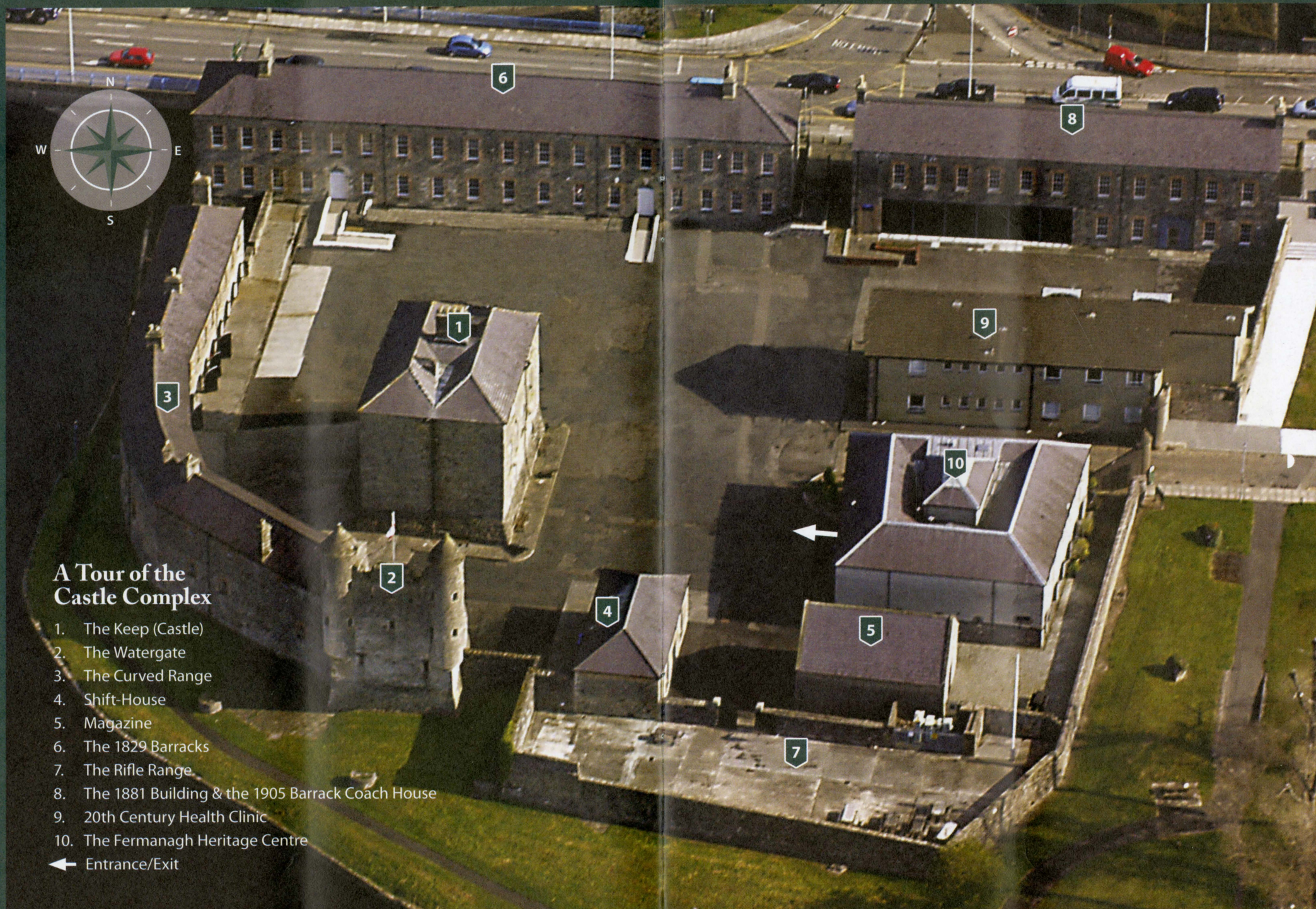
In 1607 Captain William Cole was appointed Constable and refurbished and remodelled the Castle. The Keep was repaired and the Watergate was added. In the late 18th century the complex was remodelled as the Castle Barracks. The last Regiment to be stationed here was the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers from 1903 to 1905. The Territorial Army were later based here from 1947 to 1958.

With the many changes that have happened to the castle complex, it can be hard to imagine what this looked like in the 15th century. Originally the Castle was enclosed by a curtain wall surrounded by water-filled ditches. These reinforced its already defensive position on an island. In time these features were replaced as the Castle went through many changes of fashion and was extended into the surrounding area. Today it retains a sense of its former defensiveness and is an important landmark for the town of Enniskillen.









## A Tour of the Castle Complex

1. The Keep (Castle)
  2. The Watergate
  3. The Curved Range
  4. Shift-House
  5. Magazine
  6. The 1829 Barracks
  7. The Rifle Range
  8. The 1881 Building & the 1905 Barrack Coach House
  9. 20th Century Health Clinic
  10. The Fermanagh Heritage Centre
- ← Entrance/Exit



## 1 The Keep

Built 1420s

The Keep (Castle), is the oldest building on site. It was first built in the 1420s, but has been much altered since then.



How the Keep may have looked in the 15th century from the north west

### The Exterior...

As a stronghold for the Maguire chieftains, the original Keep had to resist attack as well as provide a grand residence. For this reason there are very few openings in the ground floor.

The outward sloping base of the Keep's walls is known as a 'batter'. It added strength to the walls and made it hard for them to be damaged by battering rams.

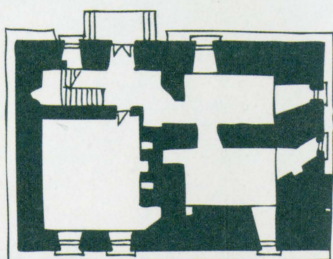
The door into the Keep is in the west wall and this is the side pictured in the

illustration of the 1594 siege. There are two other openings in the lower walls. These are the waste chutes for ancient toilets called 'garderober'. One of these can still be seen in the north wall on the upper floor when you visit the interior.

Sir William Cole took over this Maguire stronghold in the early 1600s and largely re-built the upper floors. They were remodelled again in the 18th century.



The large windows were added to the Keep during the 18th century, a sign of more peaceful times. The original Keep would have had much smaller windows that were easier to defend and required less window glass, which was expensive at the time. The north wall, parts of the east and west walls and an interior cross wall are considerably thicker than the south end indicating the earliest parts of the castle. This can be seen in the plan below.



Plan view of the Keep

### The Interior...

The ground floor of the Keep was probably used for storage of food and armaments and would have been the reception area for visitors. The spaces at the north end look much as they did during the first several hundred years of the Keep's use. The great thickness of the walls can be seen here, as well as the vaulted ceilings. These provided support to the floors above, and were very important in providing additional security.

A portion of the top floor in the north east corner has been lowered to its original 15th-century level beside an original window recess.

The 'garderobe' in the north wall at the top floor can also be seen, with its waste chute running all the way down to the exterior at ground floor level, a very draughty place when in use!

When the Keep was first built, the Maguire chieftans would have used the whole of the first floor as a great hall, a place for entertaining, feasting and community meetings.

The chimney stack, which now runs up the centre of the building dividing these large spaces, was built in the 18th century. The upper areas would have been used as sleeping quarters and private areas for family and important visitors.

The Keep today houses the Inniskillings Museum and the Fermanagh County Museum's History of the Maguires.



The Keep as it looks today



## 2 The Watergate

Built 1614

This is probably the best-known feature of Enniskillen Castle. In spite of the name it isn't, in fact, a gate at all. This semi-defensive tower was built by William Cole in 1614 as a feature to show off his Manor House.

The Watergate has two distinctive corbelled-out turrets in Scottish style with conical caps.

A well is contained within the structure of the Watergate and would have been a vital source of water in case of a siege.

The flag of St George flies over the Watergate, a tradition that goes back to the 17th century when local soldiers of the Inniskilling Regiments fought for the Protestant William of Orange against the Catholic James II.

They received recognition within the Williamite Army, and later became the 5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards and the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. The Watergate has long ago been adopted as an emblem



Military costume - 17th century



The Watergate

### The Manor House...

The Manor House itself was thought to have been built to the east of the Keep but it was not found during archaeological excavation in the early 1990s. It is possible that a building extending from the Watergate and ruined by 1760 was used, along with the Keep, for domestic accommodation in the 17th century.





The Castle about 1630



### 3 The Curved Range

Built 1806 - 1830

This building follows the curve of the River Erne at the western side of the Castle Barracks, and dates from the early 19th century. It was built as arcaded stabling with rooms above for cavalrymen. Later it was used by artillerymen whose cannon were pulled by teams of horses.



Image: PPCC Antifa

#### Military Hospital...

At one stage during the 19th century the upstairs of the curved range was used as a hospital. Here soldiers were treated for ulceration of the legs, caused by long campaigns on foot, and also for venereal diseases. Putting medical facilities above stables was not a hygienic practice. From the 1850s there were reforms in the army following Florence Nightingale's work in the Crimea recognising the importance of cleanliness and fresh air in controlling sources of infection. For a short time the hospital transferred to the upper floors of the Keep. Part of the stable complex now contains displays of the Inniskillings Museum.



The Curved Range, showing stabling and rooms above



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## Shift-House & Magazine

Built 1806 - 1822

The Magazine was an important building for storing gunpowder. The Shift-House gets its name from the fact that workers used this space to change out of their everyday clothes to prepare gunpowder in their bare feet, wearing long garments called 'shifts'. These clothes were a precaution to avoid making any sparks caused by metal accessories such as hob-nailed boots or belts that could have set off an explosion in the gunpowder. A blast wall formerly enclosed the Magazine and connected it with the Shift House to prevent anyone from entering the gunpowder store without the proper clothing.

Gunpowder was kept in barrels made at a cooperage nearby. In the outer walls of the Magazine there are special, angled vents allowing air to circulate to keep the gunpowder dry without exposing it to danger of sparks.



Wooden barrels used to store gun powder

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## The 1829 Barracks



Military parade next to the 1829 Barracks

This building was constructed in 1829 on a strip of land purchased on the northern edge of the site. It is a two-storied structure, built of limestone, with a slated roof, hipped at each gable-end. The Georgian panel windows are set in brick-trimmed window-bays and there are simple fanlights above the doors.

At first this was used as an armoury where guns and swords were stored. A defence wall was added to the north of the building for added security. In later years the armoury became a dining facility for officers. Throughout its use as a barracks, the main entrance was through a gateway to the east of this building. Today the local Roads Service has offices here.



## **7 The Rifle Range**

Originally this was the camp commander's garden in the late 19th century. This area later became a small firing range.

## **8 The 1881 Building & The 1905 Barrack Coach House**

The building at the north-east of the complex was constructed in two stages. Closest to the north east corner is a structure created in 1881 as part of the Cardwell Army Reforms, which sought to improve many features of military life. It operated mostly as an equipment store. By 1905 a new building was joined to the west end. This was designed for the era of motorised transport. The bays in which army vehicles were once parked are now closed off with wooden panelling.

## **9 20th Century Health Clinic**

Built 1960s

Formerly the site of the married officers' quarters in the 19th century this building dates to the 1960s.

## **10 The Fermanagh Heritage Centre**

Built 1993



The Heritage Centre

When it first opened in 1969, the Fermanagh County Museum was in the Keep. In 1993, it moved to this new building, sensitively designed by architect Richard Pierce to fit in with the older buildings. It contains displays on the history, archaeology and natural history of the county with temporary exhibitions on diverse subjects.





Aerial view of Enniskillen Castle Complex



## On-site Museums & Displays

### The Fermanagh Heritage Centre

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Run by Fermanagh District Council, this museum has a full programme of special exhibitions held throughout the year, it also exhibits award-winning displays about Fermanagh's archaeology, history and wildlife and a number of audio-visual programmes. Fermanagh County Museum also provides a range of educational programmes covering topics such as art, the natural environment, life in early times, Vikings in Ireland, the 17th century Plantation, World War II, and life in the recent past

### The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers Regimental Museum

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The museum's collections relate mainly to the history of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and Dragoon Guards and include regimental uniforms, weapons, standards, badges, medals, engravings and photographs. In pride of place is the bugle sounded at the charge of the regiment in the Battle of the Somme in 1916.

### The Cannon

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The two bronze cannon at the east front of the Keep are on loan from the Royal Armouries in the Tower of London. They are similar to cannon used in the Battle of Waterloo (1815) where the Inniskilling Dragoons fought with distinction. The iron cannon situated at the east of the Keep is from the late 18th century and came from County Londonderry.



### The Howitzer Gun

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The Howitzer gun which stands behind the Watergate was captured from the German Army during the First World War, and was presented to the family of Lieutenant Otto Brooke of Brookborough, to commemorate his award of the Victoria Cross.





## The Care of Enniskillen Castle

Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Built Heritage cares for Enniskillen Castle as one of the 190 monuments in State Care across Northern Ireland.

Conservation works teams work with archaeological curators to carry out regular maintenance here at Enniskillen Castle. We follow the internationally accepted principles of minimum intervention, maximum retention of historic fabric, clarity of new work, reversibility and sustainability.

Working under the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995 we ensure that the Built Heritage of Northern Ireland has the best possible protection and care. To achieve this we work closely with other Government Departments and Agencies, local Councils, community and heritage groups, developers and owners.



NIEA staff undertaking conservation work

To view further information on historic monuments in Northern Ireland visit [www.ni-environment.gov.uk](http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk)



The Curved Range undergoing restoration by the NIEA conservation works team